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ABSTRACT

The use of role playing as an instructional technique is discussed. The following facets of this subject are covered: (1) role playing as an instructional strategy; (2) the process of role playing--spontaneity; (3) the warm-up for role playing; (4) role-playing techniques, establishing characters and the leader's role; (5) sharing the role-playing experience; (6) directing a classroom role play; (7) examples of role-play activities; and (8) recommended resources for teachers. (JD)

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Using Role Playing in the Classroom

John F. Thompson

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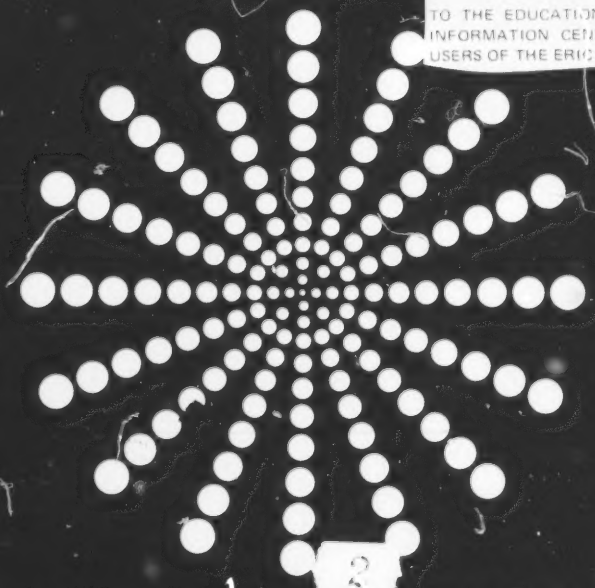

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By John F. Thompson

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Introduction

Role playing is a process through which we participate in life's experiences by putting ourselves in another's shoes and viewing the world through another's eyes. The process is powerful and exciting. As a teaching technique, it can be used with all age levels and in most areas of the curriculum. It is most effective when dealing with topics and issues that involve the emotions, controversy, and problem-solving situations.

Psychologists tell us that the concept of role is central to the understanding of personality development. Society's expectations for the roles we assume interact with our own role perceptions to create the kind of person we eventually become.

In a static society roles could be quite rigid, but in our rapidly changing, mobile era, society's role expectations are not as precisely defined as they were in an earlier period. Simply to cope requires considerable role flexibility.

Experience in role playing gives one an opportunity to take the role of another, to "try on for size" a role that moves beyond the boundaries of one's perceived role. This capacity to take the role of another broadens the social roles one can assume. Further, the experience of role playing puts one in touch with the feelings of others, fosters empathy, and generates confidence for dealing with conflict.

While originally developed as a technique in counseling and group psychotherapy, role playing has been adapted for use in classroom

teaching and other group learning situations. It uses both elements of drama and of play for instructional ends. In role playing students can experience interacting with others without the risks of the actual experience.

Role playing is both a process and a set of skills. The process involves one's intellect, emotions, and physical being. The skills involve the ability to play many roles and to listen to and react to others. The processes and skills of role playing are introduced in this fastback with the hope that they will become part of the repertoire of instructional strategies used by creative teachers.

Role Playing as an Instructional Strategy

Of all the instructional strategies available to teachers, role playing is probably the least used. Why is it not used more frequently? One reason is the very power it possesses. Students often project themselves wholeheartedly into role playing, and it becomes quite intense. It can be a "high risk" instructional strategy for both students and teachers.

Unlike typical school work assignments, role playing exposes the student to possible criticism or ridicule by his peers. For the teacher who must demonstrate role playing techniques and act before the class, this too can be embarrassing.

A role-playing scene can often invoke behaviors and emotions such as crying or anger. If one shows an emotion, it is high risk. After all, people have been taught that showing emotions is a sign of weakness. However, once students become accustomed to role playing, its risks are minimized and they will eagerly participate in it.

Role playing is an active method. Students are moving as well as talking and interacting. The action and plot are movement-oriented. Since action comes naturally to youngsters, they take readily to role playing. Students should play their parts as if they were the actual persons in the situation. In a kitchen scene the student might mix batter, check the oven, stir the food, set the table, and wash utensils while carrying on a dialogue.

Males and females should have the experience of role playing the

opposite sex in some scenes. Many persons working with youth have found that letting them reverse roles leads to a better understanding of the problems peculiar to each sex.

Another asset of role playing is that a number of students can be involved at the same time. Usually several persons are needed for each situation, and the rest of the class will be involved by sharing opinions and impressions at the conclusion of the role play. You can also set up role-playing exercises that involve the entire class, for example, by having the class vote on an issue after both sides of it have been presented in a role-playing situation.

Many instructional strategies end up being largely intellectualizations with a great deal of talking, explaining, and defending. Feelings are suppressed. Role playing encourages a student to *experience* emotions.

Acting out situations through role playing can lower the risk of dealing with many sensitive issues. Many people are afraid to share their problems with others but may be willing to role play someone else with problems like theirs. They can hide behind the "role" they are playing but at the same time express intense emotions they genuinely feel. It is also possible for students to vent aggression through role playing. A student frustrated with school often expresses that frustration by getting into fights, writing on the walls, skipping classes, and so on. In a role-playing situation that student can express his frustration in words and by physically aggressive activity such as taking a pillow and banging it on the floor over and over again until he realizes that being aggressive does not alleviate the frustration. At that point the role playing can move on to causes and solutions for the frustration.

Role playing allows us the unique opportunity to view the world through another's eyes. For example, students can view the American Revolution through the eyes of King George. What were his reactions to our nation's activities in the 1770s? Students can role play slaves at the time of the Civil War—those who wanted to be free and those who did not. In the TV series "The Ascent of Man," Galileo was portrayed in a very different light than in most science texts. The social pressures of his times were introduced to explain the suppression of his ideas be-

cause they were contrary to accepted beliefs. Having students role play Galileo in those times may give them insights into that era.

Role playing provides an opportunity to practice behaviors that are both acceptable and unacceptable. Students can be aggressive leaders, passive leaders, dictators, or democratic leaders. Students can show what kinds of behavior they think other students use to attract attention. How do you talk on the telephone to convey your message when you cannot be seen? How do you meet people and begin a conversation? All these behaviors can be practiced through role playing.

The more practice students have in playing various roles and aspects of roles, the more able they will be to handle the roles they may be called upon to assume later in life.

The Process of Role Playing: Spontaneity

The major difference between role playing and regular drama is the lack of a written script. All the elements of drama are present in role playing except for the script. In role playing the actors generate the script spontaneously. Because spontaneity is so critical to role playing, the teacher should begin with practice sessions to help students learn to relax so that they undertake role playing spontaneously.

Spontaneity can be practiced by placing students in novel situations and asking them to respond. Begin by having students role play situations for which there is no stereotyped behavior, such as the color green, or the number two, or an ear, or a clap of thunder, or a squiggle. Eventually students can give quick and frequently creative responses to such improvisational activities. Do not comment on or criticize the spontaneous responses of students until after the role-playing exercise is completed. Comments can stifle creativity. Once I asked a class to be a rock. One student immediately curled up in a ball on the floor and started rolling around. In the sharing session that followed, the student's classmates criticized him for rolling, saying that a rock just sits there. The student said he was in a stream and was bouncing around the stream bed as the water carried him along. Later, the student said he had not thought about his actions ahead of time and assumed everyone knew he was in the stream until other students raised the question. This student's creativity expanded his classmates' notion of what a rock could be.

To a degree we can assess a student's skill in spontaneity by timing his reactions to an unfamiliar situation. Suppose we tell a student he is in the principal's office and has just been told he is to be thrown out of school. How soon will he begin to play the role? Does he insist on a detailed explanation? The more the student asks for instructions to be repeated or rephrased, the more resistance he has to being spontaneous. We can also assess spontaneity by how long it takes for the role-play situation to be resolved. The longer the situation is dragged out, the less spontaneity is expressed.

Getting youngsters to practice spontaneity in the classroom will provide them with a warm-up to role playing. Practicing spontaneity reduces anxiety and lowers the risk of role playing. Students can hardly fail if we set up a role-play and *accept all interpretations*. For example, when we ask the students to role play the color blue, we must remember that there is no right way to do it. Therefore, all students who do anything at all are correct. With total acceptance, students feel less resistance to the next step in role playing, the warm-up exercise.

The Process of Role Playing: The Warm-Up

Creating a positive anticipation of an event is referred to as a "warm-up." A speaker tells some jokes or funny stories before he begins his basic lecture. People exchange pleasantries and shake hands before entering into any substantive conversation. A businessman offers a client a cup of coffee before beginning negotiations. These are all warm-ups; they occur frequently in many areas of life.

In role playing, the warm-up process helps people become more receptive to ideas and suggestions. It reduces inhibitions and resistance. Trust for other people is built during the warm-up process. Tensions are reduced. Warm-up sessions are designed to be positive experiences. They are most effective when short and well executed by the teacher. Warm-ups should be tailored to the person, group, and topic being considered.

To warm up a class to role playing, use some exercises that are fun and easy to do. Let the student be a tree or the letter *T*. Let him paint a wall or be something small. Or let him move like a machine. Have a student assume a particular stance. Have another student attach himself in some manner to the first. Continue until all the students are hooked into one another as a large object of humanity. Then start over, this time making one part of a student's body move as another student hooks on. This exercise is meant to be fun. Then for a third effort have students move different parts of their bodies and make sounds as well as assume funny positions. When all the students are hooked on, mov-

ing parts of their bodies and making sounds, you will have a hilarious picture. This series of warm-up exercises is fun and easy to do. Any response is a correct one; there can be no value judgments; and everyone is involved. Additional warm-ups can be found in the references listed in the resource section of this fastback.

In addition to the fun type activities above, warming up a group includes each person sharing a little of himself in addition to his name. Getting to know each other can involve sharing family information, hobbies, interests, and feelings. In each case the warm-up is intended to allow an individual the freedom to share what he wants, from very little to a great deal. No pressure is applied to make him share something he does not want to share.

Successful role playing depends upon the warm-up. How well you act out your role depends upon your warm-up to the role-playing situation and to the other persons involved. If a warm-up is incomplete or absent, then the role-playing activities will not achieve the desired results. In taking time to go through a warm-up, teachers should not apologize for the activities. They are necessary and in no way detract from the purpose of the class. If a group does react negatively to the warm-up, check to see if the activities were inappropriate.

The major action in role playing takes place after the warm-up. The next section deals with deciding what to act upon, starting and stopping the action, and various techniques of role playing.

Role-Playing Techniques

Learning the techniques of role playing can best be accomplished through practice. Students practice these techniques separately and they can then be applied as needed.

Choosing the Issue for Role Playing

The role-playing issue can be serious (eliminating a classroom discipline problem) or light (trolls guarding a bridge). Role playing can be past-oriented (why tariffs were imposed in early American history), present-oriented (what I feel right now at this school dance), or future-oriented (what my death will be like). Role playing can focus on reality (what will happen in our school when the school board's new policy on student rights is implemented) or fantasy (let's build a make-believe factory that will produce warm fuzzies). Role playing can deal with a personal problem (how I can get through to my mother, who is turning me off). It can be oriented to school work (why I never seem to complete my work on time). Role playing can focus on religion (church seems to have no meaning for me anymore). It can be content- or concept-oriented (let us act out the growth of a seed into a full plant, or let us role play the formation of the Redwall limestone in the Grand Canyon). Role playing can be controversy-oriented (whether the airport authority should extend a runway through a wildlife preserve). It can focus on evaluation of learning (having just studied the procedure of how a bill in the legislature becomes a law, let us role play the people

involved and determine how well we understand the process). Role playing can be used to analyze a situation (go back and recreate the session in which the peace negotiations broke down and see where some compromise might be found).

Role playing can also be used as a recreational outlet. Sit down at the lunch table and, without telling anyone, role play someone else. Or play out a scene with another person without letting those around you know that you are in a role situation. How convincing can you be?

Role playing can cover a wide variety of topics. How do we make the actual selection? One approach is to allow the group to decide what topic will be acted out. In doing this, be sure the group is warmed up. If not, spontaneity will be low, and the action will not develop well. The group should take its time in selecting the topic. Each topic or problem should be stated clearly so that everyone in the group understands it.

One method of allowing the group to select the topic is to do an "action sociogram." With this technique one issue or problem is suggested by each person—the one he feels most strongly about. However, individuals should be allowed to "pass" if they don't have an issue. If the group is very large, you might organize into smaller groups and ask each small group to come up with an issue or problem. Once the possible topics have been presented to the total group, each person gets up and goes to the person whose problem he most relates to and puts his right hand on that person's shoulder. The person whose suggested problem receives the most votes will set the scene for the role play. It is necessary to restate the problem or issue again at this point before going on, so that everyone is clear on the problem situation.

If the group is evenly divided among several choices, ask the members to indicate their second choice of topic. If this action sociogram does not produce a clear decision, the group could try a third choice or recognize the fact that it is not yet warmed up to an issue or topic.

Another approach to the selection of an issue is for the teacher or leader to do it. For example, a class is studying environmental issues and the teacher decides to introduce role playing as a method for examining all sides of a controversial environmental question. Or, a teacher may decide to use role playing to examine the issue of grading and

what it means to students, parents, and teachers. Whatever the topic, the teacher should be sure the group is warmed up to it.

A topic can also emerge naturally, without being chosen by the teacher or the group. For example, students may be discussing the need for more electives in the curriculum. As the discussion progresses, the participants may get emotional and finally the issue of who really determines the curriculum emerges. Everyone is quite warmed up to this topic, and no one needs to go through any choosing process. Role playing can begin immediately on such a topic.

Setting the Scene

Once the role-play topic or issue has been selected, the next thing to do is set the scene. This is the actual place where the action is to begin. The scene should be set up carefully. The first scene is usually concerned with the point at which the problem or issue is first noticed. In establishing that scene, give attention to the hour, day, month, and year. The physical setting should be established by calling up all the senses. Identify doors, furniture, windows, sounds, smells, temperature, light, carpet, weather, etc. Locate all physical objects and, if it makes sense, use a chair or desk to represent certain locations. Do not introduce any people to the scene until it is physically set up.

After the scene is set, the issue or problem should be restated so that everyone knows what it is. This restatement may also provide an opportunity to make sure everything needed in the scene is present. Then the introduction of the players can begin. This phase of the action is called role development.

Establishing the Characters and Roles

In the role development phase the leader of the role playing identifies who the characters are (or he may ask the main character to do it, depending upon the topic and who selected it). Both the class and the participants in the role play must know something about each character. This would include name, sex, age, personality, physical build, typical attire, title, position, and peculiar mannerisms such as nervousness, a limp, or a special speech pattern. If a person is playing himself, he can, of course, develop his own character. The key is to pro-

vide enough character details to make the actors feel comfortable in the scene, but not so specific as to inhibit spontaneity.

The Leader's Role

The leader has several responsibilities in role playing. First, he helps the main actor to set the scene and to determine the characters to be included. The leader then starts the action and keeps it moving, while clarifying the action for the rest of the class. As the action proceeds, the leader looks for themes and major ideas that are surfacing and helps the actors explore them. The actors should be allowed to pursue the theme in whatever direction they think appropriate. Each scene develops in its own way, and no two are ever exactly alike. However, the leader should decide when the scene needs to be changed and the action terminated. There is an art to being a good leader. One must be alert, sensitive, knowledgeable, and insightful. As students become proficient in role playing, they should be given the opportunity to be a leader.

Under no circumstances should a group try to explore highly emotional or controversial topics without specific training in role playing with competent instructors. Spontaneity is a powerful thing and must be used wisely. If a scene becomes intense and the leader feels he cannot handle it, he can reduce the intensity by having auxiliaries take actions to reduce tensions, use other techniques such as "doubling" (discussed in the next section), or close the scene down. Ordinarily in classroom situations there will be few such problems.

One other caution: *Watch carefully to avoid any potential injury-producing action.* If a fight is part of the action, do not let it get out of hand. Pillows can be used rather than fists or weapons. Be alert to an emotional outbreak that might be accompanied by some injury-producing action. A person in a scene may become frustrated or angry enough to strike another actor. Watch for any visible signs that such emotions are building up. If an injury-producing situation develops, do not hesitate to step in to prevent an accident. Do not worry at such a time about selecting the appropriate "role-playing technique." Being alert and using common sense generally prevent injury-producing situations.

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Action Techniques

There are some particular techniques that a leader can use to keep the action going and to develop characters and themes. Many of these role-playing techniques are also common to the theater.

A *soliloquy* permits a character to "think aloud" for the class. The leader may ask an actor a question during his soliloquy, but generally an actor should talk about whatever he thinks is important for the class to know about his thoughts and feelings. A soliloquy also allows the actor to be aware of his thoughts at a given moment.

Role reversal is the process by which an actor steps out of his regular role in the drama and takes the role of another person or thing in the action. This is used to help the actor get in touch with the other characters in the scene. For example, a person role playing a principal who is disciplining a student might reverse roles with the actor playing the student. In doing so he could gain a better understanding of how the student feels and what he thinks about the principal's behavior. Role reversal can also be used with objects. During a lesson on electricity, a student might role play a wire with electricity going through it and tell the class what it feels like. Or he could be Columbus and tell the class what it was like to sight land for the first time on the voyage to the New World. Or a student might be a piece of paper upon which another student is finger painting and describe that feeling.

An *auxiliary* is a member of the class who comes into a scene to play a role necessary to the scene. As a rule, a minimum number of auxiliaries should be used in a scene. Too many people make it difficult to follow the action. Auxiliaries can be objects significant to the action, such as trees, mailboxes, or plants, as well as people.

The *interview* technique is often used to introduce a new character into the action. The person doing the interviewing helps to define the character through the questions asked. The class gets its impression of the new person from the interview dialogue.

Self-presentation is the technique in which a person tells the class about himself. He provides as much information as he feels is warranted. In a role-playing situation each actor defines his own character. This technique is often more effective than having the leader de-

scribe each character. It also allows a person to add dimensions to his role.

Doubling is another technique that can be very powerful in role playing, and fun as well. In this technique a person from the class is selected by the main character to sit behind him and be his conscience. The double talks to the actor he is working with like an imaginary conversation going on within the head of the actor. The others in the scene must not respond to anything the double says, since his dialogue is supposedly going on in the actor's head. But the class and everyone in the scene can, in fact, hear. When the double interacts with the actor, the people in the scene pause a moment to give the actor and his double a chance to talk. The double is always supportive and trys to help the actor clarify his own thinking. A double speaks in the first person. Since this technique is sometimes difficult to understand, let us explore an example.

An actor role playing a teacher with a double in a scene at a faculty meeting listens to the school principal telling the faculty why children cannot leave the building without a teacher being present.

DOUBLE: I don't like the sound of that. I let my students out like that all the time and nothing has happened.

ACTOR: Yes I do, and the children behave very well.

DOUBLE: I feel guilty if he is aiming those remarks at me.

ACTOR: No. He told me yesterday he saw one of my kids outside and the student was behaving perfectly.

DOUBLE: Yes. If all the kids were like the ones I have, he would not have to be saying those things. I really feel good about my students.

ACTOR: I sure do.

DOUBLE: What will my kids say when they hear this?

ACTOR: They will not like it. I wonder if the principal will tell them or if I will have to do it.

DOUBLE: It would be difficult for me to support the rule.

ACTOR: Yes. It's his rule. Let him tell them.

DOUBLE: I want my kids to be mad at him, not me.

ACTOR: Right on.

DOUBLE: This rule makes me angry. I wonder what I should do.

ACTOR: I would like to tell the principal what I think, but he does not like to be challenged.

DOUBLE: I sure don't want the principal mad at me.

ACTOR: I guess not.

DOUBLE: But I do not like the rule either.

ACTOR: No. I do not.

DOUBLE: What am I going to do?

The person doubling should be very alert to physical cues of the actor he is working with, as well as the verbal ones. The double should notice posture, nervous movements, facial expressions, inflections in the voice, shifting of the body, and arm or hand movements. The double should sit or stand just slightly behind and to the left or right of the actor and should assume the physical position of the actor. If the actor moves or changes position, the double should slowly and unobtrusively do likewise. This helps the double be in touch with the actor. Once again, the double is used to help the actor clarify his or her thoughts and to let the class know what feelings are being experienced by the actor—feelings that may not be evident outwardly. Normally, only the main character will have a double in a scene.

Another technique is *mirroring*. Here, an actor steps outside the scene (while it continues) to view the action and to gain added perspective on what is happening. An auxiliary takes over his acting role and the scene continues—not setting any new directions but reemphasizing what has been happening. The leader may help the actor see how his behavior is affecting what is going on in the scene. Athletes and artists often videotape themselves in order to see how they might improve their performance. Mirroring does much the same thing.

The *projective chair* is a technique that uses an empty chair and one actor. The actor can place in that chair anyone or anything that makes sense to the scene or makes sense to the actor. For example, if an actor would like to talk to Leonardo da Vinci, he would let the empty chair represent Leonardo. Then the actor begins to interact with Leonardo as though he were sitting in the chair. The actor can lecture to him, ask questions, or converse with him. At appropriate times, the director may ask the actor to role reverse with Leonardo, sit in the

chair, and respond to what the actor is doing. In effect, he would answer the questions asked of Leonardo as if he were Leonardo. He can practice doubling with the empty chair and the person he has identified as sitting there. He can interview the chair. The chair can hold objects as well as people. This projective chair technique is limited only by an actor's spontaneity and creativity.

Maintaining the Flow of Action

With the role-play topic chosen, the scene set, and the characters for the initial scene introduced, the action can begin. The time between the selection of the topic and the start of the action should be just long enough to warm everyone up and set the scene properly. If the time lapse is too long, the spontaneity of the actors will drop off and the warm-up may lose its effect.

When the action starts, the leader should try to keep the characters in the scene moving if at all possible. Even if the scene takes place in an automobile, for instance, the person driving should move the steering wheel. Movement is essential to maintain class interest and increase the degree of realism in the role-play situation. The techniques discussed earlier can be used to further the action, explore a theme that seems to be emerging, or make a point that the leader thinks will keep the action moving.

The ultimate purpose of role playing is to identify problems and to allow the action to pursue them to some sort of conclusion. The outcome of the role play might be a solution to an actual problem. Role play can also result in empathy for the real persons involved in the problem situation. A role play can arrive at solutions that can be applied to real problems. For example, a student council might role play the entire presentation it plans to make to the principal regarding the addition of an activity program to the lunch hour. It can then critique the presentation and make changes before seeing the principal.

Concluding the Action

When a role-playing situation reaches a climax or high point (this can occur after one scene or several scenes), the leader should prepare to terminate it. The leader should let the climax happen naturally and

not rush it, and when the insight has been gained by the actors involved, he should begin to tie up the ends and terminate the action. The leader should be sure the actors understand what the insight or solution is and that they must make it clear to the class. The climax is often a very emotional event and emotions should be expressed.

An essential element in the termination of role playing is an *integration* of what happened in the role play. It is not a rehash of the action or a critique of how well people played their roles. Rather, integration is a restatement of the climax to be sure the actors and the class perceive the insight or solution.

One of the important points in role playing that is often overlooked is that the action should be directed toward involving the whole class. Actors should face the class and speak loudly enough to be heard by the audience. The class members should be able to project themselves into the action and relate to characters, ideas, and insights without ever moving from their seats. After the role play is over, the actors and the class members should all respond to the action. This technique will be dealt with in the next section on "sharing."

Sharing the Role-Playing Experience

The final and perhaps most important part of the role-playing experience for the class is the sharing session at the conclusion of the role-play activity. This session should *not* be allowed to turn into a critique of the action or of how well various persons played their roles. It should be focused on what each member of the class experienced during the role-play drama. What did he learn as a result of watching the role playing? What feelings was he aware of during the drama? At what point did they occur? What conclusions did he draw from the action? How will he act differently in his own life as a result of what he experienced? All of these reactions should be "first person" reactions from the class, not the actors. At the very end of the role-play sharing session the actors may comment on the experience. It is also important that the leader participate in the sharing to let the class know what he gained from the experience.

If the leader wishes to critique the actions of the role players or of the role-play itself, he should do it after the sharing session is over and preferably after a break for the students.

In a good role play it takes time for the impact to settle and a personal integration to take place. Some members of the class can help others clarify the outcomes of the role-playing situation. This final process should not be rushed. If a scene has not worked very well, it is usually due to the lack of warm up or the inability of the actors to develop and work through a problem. The sharing session will often pinpoint these shortcomings.

One of the author's most memorable experiences with the sharing process occurred at the conclusion of a four-day conference involving a great deal of role playing. A group of about 35 graduate students and faculty members were sharing their feelings and thoughts about the conference. After four or five persons had verbally indicated their feelings, one graduate student said he would like to role play his evaluation nonverbally. With that he spontaneously acted out his personal insights for the group, taking about five minutes to do so. The impact on the group was tremendous. The young man had no previous acting experience. He just spontaneously communicated a sharing none of us in the group will ever forget.

Now that various components of the role-playing process have been presented, it might be helpful to follow an actual classroom role play from beginning to end. No two role-playing experiences are ever the same, and reading about one is not the same as actually experiencing it. With those two factors in mind, let us look at a sample role play.

Directing a Classroom Role Play

The situation described here is adapted from a role-playing activity done with a junior high school science class.

The Situation: A ninth-grade science class has planted grass seed in front of the school building as part of a project in ecology to improve the environment. The area was carefully identified as new grass; the purpose of planting it was explained, and instructions were posted to stay off until it had an opportunity to grow. Two days after planting, three students were seen walking on the seeded area. The science class was upset (a natural warm up) and wanted the teacher to do something about it. The teacher used this issue as the situation for a role play: How can we keep these students and others from walking on the newly seeded area?

Selection of Role Players: Three of the students who were most involved in the actual situation immediately volunteered to be role players. These three were selected as the main actors. They in turn selected two more students to represent the remainder of the group of upset students. One selected student did not want to role play and that refusal was accepted. Another student was selected. Two additional students were selected to play the students who walked on the seeded area. They were eager to role play the offenders, and one of them was in fact one of the culprits.

Setting the Scene: The scene was set by the three main actors. It was in the driveway in front of the school building. It was a warm, sunny, October day during lunch period, and many students were milling about in front of the school. The seeded grass area was identified with a piece of cardboard. No teachers were visible in the area.

The Class: The class was seated in a semicircle around the "stage" area in the center of the classroom. The tables, chairs, and lab equipment had been moved aside. The teacher was standing just outside the scene as it was set, with the actors facing the audience. The class was asked to save all questions, reactions, and critiques until after the role play was over.

The Action, Scene 1: The group representing the upset students were talking to one another until one noticed that the two offenders were standing by the grass seed and yelling that they were going to walk on it. The five students stopped their conversation and one of them called to the two, warning that they had better not walk on the grass seed or they would get into trouble. After some taunting, one of the two offenders stepped on the grass seed and proceeded to make big, deep footprints in the seeded area. The five students ran to the area and demanded that he get out of that area. He refused. The second offender then joined his friend in the seeded area. The group of five tried threats, pleadings, arguments from the class discussions on environmental issues. Then the group turned their backs on the two, hoping that they would change the offenders' behavior by denying them the attention they appeared to want. When that failed too, the five students told a teacher in the school building what was going on outside. After a few more jumps on the seeded area, the students walked out of it and onto the driveway. The teacher provided a double for one of the offenders at this point so that the actor could get at the thinking process of the character he was portraying. Some insights into the motivation for the act emerged. The scene ended there.

The Action, Scene 2: The second scene was set in the classroom where the five students reported their actions to their teacher. Another actor

was brought in to role play the teacher. Through role reversals and interviewing, the student playing the teacher was filled in on what his role was to be. The students then acted out this classroom scene.

The Action, Scene 3: The two offenders and the five upset students participated in a sort of court scene at this point. The five students wanted to resolve the issue. They realized that they themselves had not acted on the problem directly but hoped a teacher or the principal would discipline the two offenders. They knew they were capable of acting on their own but had failed to use their group strength. Suddenly they stood up without saying a word and moved toward the student who had instigated the incident in the driveway. The offender turned white as the five students backed him against the wall and grabbed him. The teacher did not interfere in the action at that moment. One at a time, in slow, clear language, each of the five angry students made it very clear to the offender that his behavior was not acceptable and that he was to assure them all that he had gotten the message. He quickly indicated that he had and would not walk on the grass-seeded area again. The group released him and he sank into a chair with a sigh of relief as the color slowly returned to his face. The group then turned to the other offender, who immediately said he would behave properly. Just before the group had released the first offender, his double shared the thinking of the accosted student with the audience. He explained how school, home, and self-concept problems had resulted in frustration, which he attempted to release through aggression. The double's explanation caused the class to re-evaluate their opinion of the first offender.

Integration: The five students gave soliloquies to express their feelings after accosting the offenders, while the double helped integrate the actions for the two students. The final action involved trying to find some common ground for the five students and the two offenders to work together to keep the seeded area intact and to help each other in school.

Termination: All students shook hands and the two offenders agreed to smooth out their footprints in the seeded area and reseed if needed. The other five students agreed to help them.

Sharing: The sharing was very emotional. Almost every student in the class had something to say. The bell at the end of the period was ignored and the next class was sent to wait in the library. The students learned a great deal from this role play. As the word of the experience spread through the school, students asked for more role-play activities.

As a final note, the newly seeded grass remained undisturbed—until a school bus drove over it two months later.

It is important to note that this role-playing situation came from the students. The lessons learned were solid and positive, and they could have applied to a social studies class as well as to a science class. The language arts teacher could have used this same role-play situation as a lesson on group action when teaching *Lord of the Flies*. The guidance counselor could have used it as an activity when dealing with student discipline. Such lessons are not soon forgotten.

Examples of Role-Play Activities

A handbook on role playing is like a handbook on golf. You can read it and memorize it, but you cannot learn to lead good role playing or play good golf without practice. Some suggested ideas for role playing in the classroom follow, but remember, your own imagination will determine how and when you will use role playing in your teaching. Some of these activities are appropriate as warm-ups; some are more suitable for young children; some deal with interpersonal problems of adolescence; still others are directly related to curriculum content at various grade levels.

Feelings. Post a list of typical human feelings such as surprise, anger, elation, fear, relaxation, boredom, etc. Have the students role play the following situations and express their feelings both verbally and nonverbally:

You just found a $5 bill.

You are standing in line at a ticket counter and the last ticket is sold to the person in front of you.

You open a package containing a big present for you.

You just received a note saying that the principal wants to see you.

You meet a person who supposedly has been spreading rumors about you.

You are in the woods and hear a rattlesnake near you.

Your closest friend has just announced plans to move out of state.

Actions: Move like a bird, a kangaroo, a guppy, a tree, a flower, a rock, a river, a verb, a noun, the color blue, the number 13, your favorite animal, your zodiac sign. With imaginary props, hammer, saw, dust,

clean, ice a cake, draw a gun, blow bubbles, swim, run while holding a glass full of water, put on pants, wash hands, brush teeth, toss an imaginary object to another (vary the imaginary object to include a heavy one, a light one, a hot one, a prickly one, a gooey one, etc.). Dance, walk up imaginary steps, ride a bicycle.

Being Others: Role play someone you are not.

Biography: Be a specific person such as Tom Sawyer, Beethoven, Christopher Columbus, Pythagoras, Clarence Darrow, John Denver, George Washington Carver, Ernest Hemingway, Adolph Hitler, Copernicus, Babe Ruth, Abigail Adams, Amelia Earhart.

Occupational: Be a police officer, doctor, homemaker, teacher, carpenter, dental technician, salesperson, dairy farmer, hairdresser, lawyer, nurse.

Societal Role: Be a mother, father, grandmother, son, daughter, uncle, friend, wife, employee, boss.

Situations: Role play a famous person or an anonymous person and act out the following situations:

You see a student teasing another student.

You are a student who is being called names.

The authorities are about to arrest you for your views.

You are caught cheating on an exam.

You are a defense attorney in the Scopes trial.

You are a witness to the invention of the zero.

You are a poet submitting your poems to a publisher for the first time.

You wake up and find your house on fire.

As the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, hold a conversation with a present-day advocate of women's liberation.

- You are attempting to catch a dinosaur that has escaped from the zoo.

  Pitch the ninth inning of a World Series no-hitter.

Simulations: These are usually longer role-playing scenes than "situations" and involve a number of characters. In each simulation, one or more decisions must be made to culminate the action. Actors are assigned or choose the role they are to play. Here are two examples of simulations:

Problem: Should the city council approve extending an airport runway into a wildlife preserve?

Interest Groups	*Role*
City Council	Must vote
Animal Protection Agency	Resource persons
Airport Authority	Presents case for
Airline Pilots Association	Resource persons
Citizens To Save Wildlife	Presents case against
Class	Votes to keep or fire each city council member after decision is made

Problem: Should students be permitted to chew bubble gum in school?

Interest Groups	*Role*
Student Council	Must vote
Dental Association	Resource persons
Concerned parent/teacher group	Presents case against
Bubble gum manufacturers	Resource Persons
Triple-Bubble (student group)	Presents case for
	Votes on whether to keep student council members after the council makes its decision

Play: Young people role play as they play. Children play cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, Star Wars; they play with Barbie dolls, toy soldiers, doll houses, blocks, kiddie cars, nurse kits; they dress up in adult clothes, and they pretend they are race car drivers. A school playground should have some of the following to encourage role playing: a fort-type structure, a sand box, a large concrete pipe, a wooden bridge, a playhouse, an old plane, boat, car, or tractor. Other products that encourage youngsters to role play include T-shirts with a favorite athlete's number on it, a brand-name tennis racquet endorsed by a favorite player, products advertised by famous people. Often a pet will serve as a partner in role playing by children.

Games: Role-playing games can be developed from many of the examples suggested below. The resources listed at the end of this fastback contain additional suggestions.

Print activities on index cards. Students choose a card and follow instructions.

List personality traits (such as angry, intelligent, scheming, generous) on index cards. Each student selects one card and assumes those personality characteristics in the action that follows.

Have students draw a personality trait card and role play a person with those traits. See if his classmates can figure out what kind of person the student is portraying.

Have students role play someone else for a full day in school or at home. How did it feel? What problems did they encounter?

Use commercially available role-play games such as *Ecology*, *Redwood Controversy*, *Newtown*, *Insight*, *Sensitivity*, and *Futuribles*.

Almost all content in the curriculum can be adapted to role playing. The decision as to whether to use role playing as an instructional method will depend on the teacher's objectives. There are times when role playing might be used simply as a fun activity and a diversion from the usual routine. Its more serious use, however, is for those

topics in the curriculum that are controversial and emotion-laden. Of course, it would be unwise to overuse role playing, since an excess of anything will soon cause it to be less effective.

The more students learn to enjoy role playing and become skillful at it, the better able they will be to cope with the roles they must play in life. They will also better understand other people and situations for having lived through them.

Recommended Resources

Brown, George I. *Human Teaching for Human Learning: An Introduction to Confluent Education.* New York: Viking Press, 1971.

A report on the Ford-Esalen Project to combine affective and cognitive education using a gestalt psychology base, this book includes examples of how role playing was used with youngsters to foster understanding of themselves and the materials they were studying.

Essentia Project. *Essence I & II.* Menlo Park, Calif.: Addison Wesley, 1975.

These materials, designed for use in elementary and secondary classrooms, contain graphic role-playing exercises to generate spontaneity through open-ended activities. Appropriate to all subject areas.

Gorton, Richard A. *Conflict, Controversy, and Crisis in School Administration and Supervision.* Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1972.

A book of case studies that make excellent role-play situations for inservice or preservice work with public school administrators.

Grounlund, Norman E. *Sociometry in the Classroom.* New York: Harper, 1959.

Included are the more classical applications of role playing and sociometric techniques to the learning situations. Excellent background materials.

McCaslin, Nellie. *Creative Dramatics in the Classroom.* 2d ed. New York: David McKay, 1974.

This book emphasizes formal dramatics in the classroom rather than role playing. It includes many ideas for building plays from curricular topics.

Maier, Norman R. F. and Ayesha; and Solem, Allen R. *The Role-Play Technique*. La Jolla, Calif.: University Associates, 1975.

This book focuses on management and leadership in business and industry and includes 20 role-play situations. Similar situations could be used in distributive education classes.

Moreno, Jacob L. *Psychodrama*. Vol. 1, 4th rev. ed. Beacon, N.Y.: Beacon House Press, 1972.

This book, written by one of the founders of psychodrama, provides role-playing theory and techniques.

Moreno, Jacob L. *Psychodrama*. Vol. 3. Beacon, N. Y.: Beacon House Press, 1969.

This book is similar to Volume 1 mentioned above and includes further refinements and extensions.

Moreno, Jacob L. *The Sociometry Reader*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1960.

A series of articles from many sources that explain applications and theory of role playing and sociometry. Excellent treatment of the social atom.

Moreno, Jacob L. *Who Shall Survive?* Beacon, N. Y.: Beacon House Press, 1953.

This work of Moreno's is the classic book on sociometry, psychodrama, sociodrama, and group psychotherapy. Basic resource for those who want to pursue role playing as a tool in psychology.

Romey, William D. *Consciousness and Creativity*. Canton, N. Y.: Ash Lad Press, 1975.

This book, written in the first person, lets the reader experience how the various roles played by the author have affected his life and thinking. A beautiful view of one man's spontaneity and what he has done with it to expand his consciousness and increase his creativity.

Samples, Robert, and Wohlford, Robert. *Opening: A Primer for Self-Actualization*. Menlo Park, Calif.: Addison Wesley, 1973.

A book about living and learning, it examines the roles people

play and how to play them in different ways. Includes a discussion of core personality.

Shaftel, Fannie R. *Role Playing for Social Values.* Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.

Teaching decision making through social studies is the focus of this book. Excellent problem stories for helping students study social values.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater.* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

This handbook for teaching improvisational acting is filled with roles that can easily be introduced from the kindergarten level through graduate school. It provides theatrical background for the teacher who wishes to use role playing based on spontaneity rather than pre-scripted drama.

Stevens, John O. *Awareness: Exploring, Experimenting, Experiencing.* New York: Bantam, 1973.

Includes practical applications of gestalt psychology to personal relations and warm-up activities.

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